

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Iowa communities have a desire to rehabilitate or dispose of dilapidated houses, schools, churches, and commercial buildings as a means of spurring economic renewal and improving community safety. However economic, environmental, health, safety, and social barriers prevent the timely rehabilitation or disposal of less desirable structures. Until adequate incentives and information are provided to local decision makers these barriers will remain.

In response to the aforementioned challenges, the 2002 Iowa General Assembly established the Demolition Site Waste Task Force in Senate File 2325. The task force was directed to study issues related to the proper management and disposal of material from demolished buildings and provide a report to the general assembly by January 1, 2003. Economic, environmental, health, safety and social issues were reviewed to identify the best management practices for rehabilitating or disposing buildings.

The focus of Senate File 2325 is on burning structures for disposal. Thus a majority of the issues in this report relate to the environmental, health and safety risks of open burning. The burning of dilapidated buildings poses a significant risk to air quality and worker safety. The smoke and particulate released during the burning of buildings can exceed accepted air quality standards and guidelines. Certain populations in the community (such as asthma sufferers, the children and elderly) are at risk from smoke pollution and may require hospital visits after being exposed. The open burning of waste also decreases citizens' ability to enjoy their surroundings.

Prior to burning a dilapidated structure all asbestos containing materials must be removed, precautions must be taken to prevent lead exposure, Department of Natural Resources must be notified, firefighters have to receive proper training, and steps must be taken to ensure fire fighter safety.

Building Management Decision Hierarchy

The task force developed a hierarchy of management options for dilapidated structures.

1. Rehabilitating building at current site
2. Moving building to a different location
3. Deconstructing to salvage building materials
4. Salvaging only select high-value materials
5. Recycling the building by grinding and sorting recyclable materials
6. Using rubble-like materials as fill
7. Disposal at a landfill
8. Burning for fire fighter training purposes
9. Burning

RECOMMENDATIONS: SHORT AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Task force discussions focused on both alleviating and preventing the problem of finding economically and environmentally sound solutions for Iowa's aging building stock. The task force realizes that the current glut of dilapidated structures across Iowa requires an immediate solution. At the same time the task force strongly recommends that the legislature and Iowa communities seek long-term solutions to prevent a large number of dilapidated structures in the future. Presented here is a summary of the task force's recommendations to the General Assembly. More detail on each recommendation is available in the Demolition Site Waste Task Force report beginning on page seven and online at

<http://www.iowadnr.com/waste/recycling/cnd.html>.

Short-Term Recommendations to Alleviate Glut of Dilapidated Structures

- 1. A state and local partnership should be formed to explore the feasibility of establishing a mobile debris processing system in rural Iowa and if feasible conduct a pilot project**

- 2. Develop incentives for local reduction, reuse and recycling programs**

The Department of Natural Resources should work closely with the Iowa State Association of Counties and Iowa League of Cities to develop a framework of incentives for local solid waste agencies and local governments to establish reuse and recycling programs for construction and demolition debris.

- 3. Provide financial incentives and assistance to companies reusing or recycling construction and demolition materials**

Additional financial incentives are needed to increase the number of companies providing demolition debris management services and to stimulate the market for reused and recycled demolition materials.

- 4. Explore the use of corrections inmate labor on deconstruction projects and the training opportunities for providing inmates with construction job skills**

The use of local and state corrections inmates may enhance the economic feasibility of using deconstruction as a building disposal practice while providing job training skills to inmates.

- 5. Encourage Use of National Fire Protection Association Standards or Comparable Standard**

The state of Iowa, specifically the Department of Public Safety (Fire Service Training Bureau), should provide additional education to fire departments on how to conduct legitimate training fires and encourage use of the National Fire Protection Association 1403 Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions or a comparable standard.

Long-Term Recommendations to Prevent Future Dilapidated Structures

- 6. Review existing financial assistance programs by January 1, 2004**

All state and federal financial assistance programs related to new development, restoration or maintenance of buildings and funding of community infrastructure should be reviewed for opportunities to give a preference to the maintenance and restoration of existing structures.

- 7. The legislature should investigate providing additional state financial assistance for preventative maintenance and building rehabilitation activities**

The legislature should dedicate additional funding that will reduce the future disposal costs of dilapidated structures by encouraging maintenance and restoration of Iowa's buildings.

- 8. Adopt the United States Housing and Urban Development's Nationally Applicable Recommended Rehabilitation Provisions building code for rehabilitation projects (NARRP)**

One major hurdle preventing rehabilitation of Iowa's historic structures is the cost of complying with local building codes intended for new construction. The adoption of the NARRP would lower this hurdle.

- 9. Create a task force to study trends in landfill capacity and siting issues**

The legislature should create a task force to study existing landfill capacity, impending capacity problems and potential solutions for impending capacity problems, and report the findings by January 1, 2004.

- 10. Purchase an additional mobile fire training unit**

Mobile fire-training units provide a safer environment and a wider variety of training opportunities while at the same time reducing or eliminating the risks involved in burning buildings slated for demolition.

- 11. Open burning of demolition waste should be a last resort for disposal. In the short term, ensure all hazardous materials are properly removed prior to a training fire and safety provisions are taken during a training fire. In the long term pursue rescinding all demolition debris open burning**

The use of building demolition fires presents significant risks to the health of Iowans and the environment and should be a last resort.